



National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut

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Testimony Regarding SB 387

An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage

Respectfully Submitted by: Ashley Williams, BSW; MSW Intern, NASW/CT

Good afternoon members of the committee. My name is Ashley Williams and I am currently a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, pursuing my Master's degree in Social Work. I am the MSW intern at the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and I am here today to represent NASW/CT's stand on Senate Bill 387. As social workers, we see a strong need to raise the current minimum wage in order to help Connecticut's most vulnerable populations out of poverty, which is one of our primary missions as a profession.

Many of the 3,200 social workers that NASW/CT represents work with people who are struggling to keep their heads above water financially. According to the Connecticut Poverty Report put out by the CT Association for Community Action, people in poverty are not able to thrive and become self-sufficient because their minds are too consumed with how they are going to put food on the table tonight. As social workers, we see this stress firsthand on the faces of the people we work with. The social work profession embraces optimism and the idea that things can and will get better. However, we find that it is very hard for these poverty stricken people to look to a brighter tomorrow when they are struggling to make it through the rain today with no end to the storm in sight.

The stress that comes along with living in poverty manifests itself in many different ways depending on the person. Clients that social workers deal with who are living in poverty turn to many different avenues to try and get out of their current situation. They may turn to illegal activity such as drugs or larceny, they may also hit rock bottom and go into a downward spiral of depression and thoughts of suicide. What parent wants to look at their children and tell them that they can't afford food or new shoes to replace the ones they are currently wearing that are full of holes? These types of situations do happen on a daily basis and the stress that comes along with dealing with this puts people in a very disadvantaged place.

Also in the CT Poverty Report, it is said that as of 2010 there were 720,000 people in Connecticut who were living in poverty or in jeopardy of falling into it. This means that 21% of Connecticut residents are not strongly contributing to the livelihood of our state simply because they are not able to provide their families with the life they deserve.

The current minimum wage of \$8.25 in the state of Connecticut is not helping people out of poverty- in fact it is keeping them there. Many people that social workers deal with on a daily basis are just as hardworking as anybody else but they cannot seem to make ends meet because of the fact that they are making such a low wage. Take for example a single mother with two children who works forty hours a week at a minimum wage job (\$8.25/hr). This mother would get a check of \$330.00 a week before taxes so she wouldn't even see

that total amount. At this wage, she would have an annual salary of \$17,160.00 before taxes, which puts her family well below the federal poverty line for a family of three, which is approximately \$19,000.00 a year. This is a woman who is working feverishly to provide for her family and yet she is still finding herself dependent upon assistance programs such as WIC and Food Stamps.

The number of families in this state who are just like the one described here is growing, and as a state we need to do something to help them. Although raising the minimum wage would not be the magic wand to erase poverty in Connecticut, it would be a starting point to help those families who are struggling daily with questions that no person in this nation should have to ask: what is more important for my family, food or shelter?

Pulling people out of poverty is a multifaceted process, but raising the minimum wage would be a huge step in the right direction. NASW/CT sees a strong need for raising the minimum wage as we represent social workers who work with struggling families on a daily basis. The working members of these families are dedicated and hard workers but they are still not able to thrive in one of the wealthiest states in the nation. The time to help these people climb out of poverty is now and this is why NASW/CT supports SB 387 and we strongly urge you to vote this bill favorably out of committee.

Thank you so much for your time.